

# The California Water Action Collaborative

## WHO



The consortium includes 19 companies and 11 NGOs. Current corporate members represent the food and beverage, agriculture, technology, hospitality, and retail sectors. CWAC is professionally facilitated by Ag Innovations, a nonprofit focusing on systems change collaboration in agriculture, water, and natural resources.

## WHAT

The California Water Action Collaborative (CWAC) is a platform for diverse stakeholders - including leading environmental organizations, food & beverage companies, agricultural producers, and others - to come together and pursue collective action projects that will improve California's water security for people, business, agriculture and nature. There are currently ten CWAC projects, meaning that for each of those projects there are at least three CWAC members contributing to the project with their time, money, or other resources. Projects range from on-farm water quality management, to urban landscape transformations, to online tools to inform groundwater management, and more. The group meets for monthly calls and bi-annual convenings to share insights, discuss new project ideas, and get updates about California water happenings.

## WHY

California is a water-stressed region with great economic importance. The state supports 12% of the US population, generates 13% of its agricultural value and 14% of its GDP, while receiving only one percent of its average rainfall. Water demand is increasing as the population grows, and climate change is causing hotter, longer droughts interspersed with more intense storms. The idea for CWAC came out of a CEO Water Mandate meeting in Los Angeles in 2014, at the height of the last drought. Meeting attendees (companies and NGOs) wanted to better understand California's water challenges, identify geographies and issues of shared interest, and work together on projects that would make positive impacts on water security in the state.

## WHERE

*CWAC projects exist across the state of California, though key areas of interest include the San Joaquin Valley, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Coast, and the South Coast.*



*CWAC is governed by a steering committee comprised of three corporate and three NGO members. CWAC also has four working groups, each chaired by different CWAC members.*



## CHALLENGES

- **Translations:** Because CWAC is a multistakeholder work, sometimes members have different ways of talking about the same things. There is often a level of “translation” needed to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- **Measuring impact:** Measuring and communicating the impact of CWAC simply to a broad audience is difficult to achieve but critical for making the case for its existence.
- **Engagement:** To actively engage members, the direction of the platform must align with their multiple needs and interests. As these are constantly changing and sometimes conflicting, it is a challenge to keep all members meaningfully engaged.

## SUCCESSSES

- CWAC started five years ago as a casual working group of a handful of companies and organizations and is now a formalized consortium with 30 members and 10 projects.
- Since 2014, corporate members have invested over \$4 million in CWAC projects throughout the state.
- CWAC is fostering peer learning and has seen the maturation of companies’ thinking and action on water through the ideas and learnings they get from other CWAC members.

## KEY INSIGHTS

- Creating an environment in which members trust one another and feel they can have candid, exploratory, ambitious conversation is extremely important to the success of CWAC.
- Innovation disrupts the status quo, which can be met with resistance. CWAC and its projects are innovative. In order to allow for adoption of these innovations, new incentives, skills, markets, and policies are needed.
- Partnerships are key for effective action on water, and should be based on inclusion from the outset, common interest, clear expectations, firm commitment, and open communication.

## SCALING & REPLICATING

- CWAC helps build understanding of key issues through information exchange, so members can engage in water policy discussions in an informed and productive way. This allows business leaders to become informed advocates for CWAC and for water stewardship in California.
- CWAC projects demonstrate “the art of the possible.” The aim is to take these from pilots to the status quo through changes in government policies, regulations, and finance mechanisms.

## TAGS

### Stewardship Strategies

Water Management  
in Direct Operations

Value Chain  
Engagement

Collaboration at  
Watershed Level

Nexus Approaches

### SDG 6 Targets

